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MODERN SPANISH FICTION.

ONE of the most marked features in the Southern renaissance, if one may use this word, of the new birth of literary and scholarly aspirations in a country that has long been compelled to turn its strength to more pressing needs, is the growing interest in the language and literature of our Southern neighbors, the Spanish Americans, who are producing far more of permanent literary value than many, even of the well-read among us, are wont to suppose. Nor is this unnatural, for though close at hand to us geographically, they are removed from us politically and commercially by barriers that prove harder to pass than the broad Atlantic. They know less of us and we of them than is known in England or Germany. Yet there is, as has been said, the promise of better things. Spanish is now taught in many institutions where but ten years ago it was quite unknown, classes are growing in size, and greater demands are made on our instructors. It is therefore a timely, and not ungracious task, to direct the attention of Southern scholarly men to the development of that branch of Spanish literature which is in closest touch with the people of to-day—that is, fiction in the form of the novel and of the short story, a form that under the influence of the public school and the cheapening of printing has quite taken the place of the theatre in popular estimation in Spain.

The chief factor in this comparatively recent popularization of the Spanish novel is its frank conversion to the ideals and methods of the realistic school, not indeed in its extreme form, as we see it in Zola's *Roman Experimental*, but yet in a healthy and conscious revolt against the strained romanticism of Hugo and his decadent followers.

The founder of this modern school was a woman, Cecilia Bohl de Faber, more widely known by her pseudonym, Fernan Caballero, who died in 1877 at the ripe age of eighty.

It is significant to note that her father was a German by birth, though thoroughly identified by residence and marriage with Spain. This stood the daughter in good stead, for though a thorough Spaniard in spirit, she could not but profit from the familiarity with English, French, and German that her father's wide culture induced him to seek and that his vigilance enabled him to obtain for her. Indeed, her first story, a story that will mark an epoch in Spanish literary history, was written first in German, though immediately translated into Spanish. This novel, *La Familia de Alvarada*, won the high praise of our countryman, Washington Irving, who was minister to Spain at that time, and it deserved it both for its bold initiative and for its intrinsic worth. In it Caballero broke once and for ever with the tradition of Fernandez y Gonzalez and the others, who copied from Hugo and Sue whatever they were capable of copying—that is, chiefly their faults. We leave with her those revels of drunken imagination, and though we are perhaps less disturbed, we are surely more “delighted, raised, refined” by this first of Spaniards who dared to make her pen tell what her eyes saw. That indeed had been the trouble with Spanish fiction and drama from the first. It had been artificial, consciously so, and gloried in its artificiality. For the fantastic “light that never was on sea or land” Caballero substituted the daily sun of the Andalusian plains, roads, paths, churches, and ruins, that many of her readers had visited and that all might find with her book for a guide; and on this foundation of fact she built up a faithful, loving study of Andalusian peasant life, all the more charming because it rejects the meretricious ornament of outlandish dialect, whose baneful influence can be studied nearer home.

It is true she never quite emancipated herself, she is not quite sure that others will appreciate what is best to her mind. An extravagant situation is admitted once and again; and it would be more generous than just to attribute the mawkish moralizing of certain passages to a desire to represent the religion of the peasants which, however it may have

been superstitious, was not sentimental. And yet her critics have perhaps exaggerated this defect and doubtless there are many pious souls to whom it will seem no defect at all, and that not in Spain alone. Are there not many thousands, not nursed in Spanish nor Roman Catholic cradles, whose stomachs feel no qualm at the curdled milk of George MacDonald?

The public in Spain was not slow to recognize its liberator, and her second story, *La Gaviota*, which appeared as a serial in a Spanish newspaper, aroused a general enthusiasm. This, too, is an Andalusian tale, but, as its name implies, of fishermen and the sea. Such also is *Lágrimas*, and many others, the greater part of which, by the way, are readily accessible in the collection of Spanish authors published by Brockhaus in Leipzig.¹

Caballero had so obviously struck the popular taste that it was natural that she should find imitators who should try to do for other parts of Spain what she had done for Seville and Andalusia. Larra's vivid sketches of Madrid life, published under the name of "Figaro," in the words of a recent Spanish critic, are "embalmed in the precious myrrh of truth." They are the legitimate product of the impulse of Caballero, and live to this day because they are true to life.² But the real successor of Caballero in the field of fiction is De Trueba, who was for a long period the most popular of Spanish novelists both at home and abroad.³ He does not

¹At Mk. 3.50 a volume in paper or Mk. 4.50 in cloth. The stories published in this series are: No. 1, *Clemencia*. No. 2, *La Gaviota*. No. 5, *La Familia de Alvarada*, *Lágrimas*. No. 8, *Cuentos y Poesías Populares Andaluces*. No. 13, *Relaciones*. No. 16, *Elia*, *El Ultimo Consuelo*, *La Noche de Navidad Callar en vida y perdonar en Muerte*. No. 17, *Cuadros de Costumbres*. No. 20, *Cuatro Novelas*. No. 23, *La Farisea*, *Los dos Gracias y otras Novelas escogidas*. No. 32, *Un Verano en Bornos Cosa Cumplida*, *Lady Virginia*. No. 40, *Cuentos, Oraciones, Adivinas y Refranes populares é infantiles*.

²Two of Larra's newspaper articles may be found in Knapp's Spanish Readings (Ginn & Co.), a book of very considerable value to those who desire to acquaint themselves briefly with the literary activity of Spain in the past half century.

³A considerable number of De Trueba's novels are readily accessible in

mark, however, as great an advance on Caballero as might have been hoped for. Like the title of one of his books his stories are all apt to be *color de rosa*. He is too much an optimist to be a truthful painter of country life, and there is an idyllic note of the artificial pastoral that jars sadly with his peasants' native simplicity and the humor that smacks of mother earth. Caballero could have taught him that country life was not paradise.

José Maria de Andueza brings us back to nature again. His "Spaniards painted by themselves" (*Los españoles pintados por sí mismos*) is perhaps as good a piece of character drawing, of careful study of the peculiarities of the common people, as one is likely to find anywhere. Quíte his equal is Pereda, often called the Teniers of Spanish Fiction, and not unjustly, so minute and painstaking is his delineation of life in the narrow sphere with which he had a life-long uninterrupted acquaintance, for so far as the writer can learn he never left his native province of Santander.

Yet while his predecessors had dealt mainly with the country, he is the first to make careful studies of city life. *Pedro Sanchez* is a journalistic novel, representing the fourth estate in its glory of revolutionary tumult. But it was not here that Pereda achieved his greatest success or left the deepest mark on the rising school of fiction. For this we must look to such novels as *Sabor de la Tierruca* or *Sotileza*, the former a story of life in the uplands, which he invests with a certain majestic calm; the latter a story of fishermen and the sea. Both apt to puzzle the foreign reader at times by their faithful imitation of an untutored dialect, but so true to nature that it exercised an irresistible charm on the public and successfully quelled the opposition of the purists who saw the Dictionary of the Academy treated with shocking disrespect by the street gamins and country lads.

Yet it is probable that Pereda owes more fame to his short

Brockhaus' collection: No. 6, *El libro de los Cantares*. No. 9, *El Cid Campeador*. No. 10, *Las Hijas del Cid*. No. 18, *Cuentos Campesinos*. No. 19, *Cuentos Populares*. No. 20, *Cuentos de color de Rosa*. No. 33, *Narraciones Populares*.

stories than to his novels. These sketches are as astonishing in their range as in their minuteness. The best are perhaps those collected under the title, *Tipos y Paisajes*. In these, more than in the novels, Pereda was the efficient continuer of the work begun by Caballero. He was in many ways an anticipation of Zola, in the photographic accuracy of his descriptions and the careful study of the language of his characters. In this way his work has proved a beacon to his successors, and Galdós, one of the greatest of them, in no way exaggerates when he says, "Some of us owe to Pereda all that we are, and all of us owe him more than is commonly thought."

This praise has the greater significance when we realize the place that Galdós holds in the minds of Spaniards of to-day. Indeed, since 1880 there has been hardly any to question his pre-eminence won by ten years of hard and varied literary toil. Though a thoroughgoing realist, he has given us two cycles of historical novels which, somewhat after the manner of Tolstoi's *War and Peace*, take us through the Napoleonic wars and their sequel of unrest—the former a period on which Spaniards dwell naturally with pride and one lending itself with peculiar ease to the purposes of realistic fiction, which needs no art but nature to exceed the imagination of romance in the wild life of this conquered country and unconquerable people. Galdós has seized on the most dramatic elements in these dramatic years, and if at times he has passages, chapters, and even volumes that are wearisome, he never fails at the critical point to give us pictures of surprising breadth and great power. We need instance only the vivid minute panorama of Trafalgar, the thrilling defense of Sarragosa, and the capitulation of Bailen. His character sketches, too, are strong and clear cut. Napoleon, Wellington, Nelson, Ferdinand VII., and the rest, stand out sharply differentiated, and if the conception is not always in accord with the latest data of historical research one can only say *si non è vero è ben trovato*, and be well content.

It is probable that the foreign reader will be most attracted to this side of Galdós work, but he should not neglect for this score of volumes the less numerous studies of Madrid life, where the author's power as a realist is given freer scope. Perhaps nowhere is the varied life of the Spanish capital so clearly painted nor so faithfully, nor yet so entertainingly, for with intense application and keen instinct of observation Galdós combines an easy style, where wit vies with grace and fluency for the mastery, and the reader is borne along almost without effort on the current of the author's genius.

With Galdós we are brought to the present time, but he has had, and has still, many contemporaries of no mean merit, and at least two younger rivals who may perhaps equal if not surpass him. To the earlier period belong José Selgas and Ramon de Mesonero Romanos, who rather lagged behind than assisted the realistic movement. A curious and melancholy interest attaches also to another author who has fallen from the ranks of the new school, Pedro Antonia de Alarçon, a man of singular talent, but of an unfortunate sensitiveness to criticism which of late years condemned him to silence, if indeed it did not actually affect his brain. He has been called by a recent Spanish critic of great merit, Señora Bazan, a living bridge connecting the romanticists with the realists. The simile is most apt. He began his literary career very early with such fantastic work as *El final de Norma*, avowedly romantic, and, as is wont to be the case with a school in its decadence and nearing its end, exaggeratedly so. These tales, however, revealed great powers of dramatic narrative and gave the firm foundation for his literary career that Señora Bazan would liken to one pier of the literary bridge. Then followed some years of active military and political service, and when he next returned to literary work it was to place a second foundation on the other side of the literary stream which his mind had crossed under the maturing influences of the active life in which he had played no small part. His new work showed, too, that he

had a firm footing on the new ground. He broke his long silence with a novel, *El Escandalo*, which was indeed a scandal and a seven days' wonder in Spain. The result of the political disorder had been the undermining of the religious life and a spread of the mephistophelian spirit of mocking denial. This tendency, in which he recognized the canker worm of national character, he attacked with all his powers in a story that chained the attention by its literary merits and its dramatic interest. He had the courage to espouse this unpopular cause in two further novels, but fiction with an ulterior end is seldom of superior excellence, and there will be few who will not gladly pass by these to delight in "Captain Veneno" and "The Three-Cornered Hat" (*El Sombrero de Tres Picos*), the latter a new and already classical version of an old tale, the more welcome as Spanish folklore has yet to seek its Grimm, who would, it might seem, find as rich a harvest here as among the German peasants if he would bring a like love and patience to the quest.

Such tales disarmed criticism, but Alarçon seems to have preferred to go back to the old field and naturally brought the critical pack to his heels again. This is the more strange as he resented the criticism which he had invited and must have anticipated, so bitterly, that, like Racine and Corneille, he threw down his pen in disgust, and until his death last year could not be persuaded to emerge from an almost hermit solitude.

It is perhaps worth while to note in passing two novelists of minor merit and of contrasted character. Oller, who has made his task a minute study of artizan life and of Catalonia, a country and people so different in its language and character from the rest of Spain that it aspires to a literature of its own, and Becquer, who has been called the Spanish Edgar Poe. Like him he died young, like him he was a poet whose verses owe their chief title to existence to their remarkably morbid introspection, and like him he is the author of some short stories whose very considerable merit would secure more general recognition if their weird, unbri-

dled imagination did not make them jar on the critical taste of a public trained in realism till they cannot digest these flights of fancy without mental dyspepsia. But Becquer stands apart. He has no following, and is only a small eddy in the current of Spanish fiction, whose course we must now follow.

So far as is known to the writer the only modern Spanish novel published in the United States is a little story by Juan Valera, *Pepita Jiménez*.¹ Graceful this story certainly is, but it is unfortunate that it should be presented to the American public as a specimen of Spanish fiction, for that it certainly is not. It is essentially idealistic, and Spanish fiction and Spanish taste are at present essentially realistic, though it cannot be denied that the story achieved an immediate and wide success in Spain, which, however, was not the lot of his other novels. In fact, Valera is in the main a critic, and his critical essays² show his talents to much better advantage than his novels, as indeed he himself frankly confessed, and it is to this field that he has confined himself in recent years.

It remains to speak of two younger writers to whom one may look with confidence to maintain and carry on the traditions of the school of Pereda and Galdós. The chief of these has been Valdés, though perhaps at the present moment many would be disposed to give the palm to a woman, Señora Bazan, whose critical essays have been of much assistance to the writer of this paper.

Armando Palacio Valdés, like Oller, is from the north of Spain, and his earlier novels deal naturally with this region. He is for the Asturias what Valera and Caballero are for Andalusia, what Galdós is for Madrid. Later on he has been encouraged by success, and especially by translation to at-

¹Appleton & Co. *Edición Americana ilustrado*, \$1.25; *Edición Economica*, 50 cents.

²One of them, *De la Perversion Moral en la España de nuestros días*, has been printed in Knapp's Spanish Readings (Ginn & Co.), and affords a good idea of his exquisite style.

tempt the life of the capital. Nearly all his novels have appeared in English, and he is, no doubt, better known to English readers than any other modern novelist of Spain, perhaps better known even than he deserves to be. He has had more business shrewdness than most of his contemporaries. The profits of literary success in Spain at the best are very small. Even such a "hit" as *Pepita Jiménez* is said to have paid its author but some four hundred dollars. The foreign market, if it can be worked up, pays better, and Valdés has known how to rouse that taste for novelty that always possesses our literary Athenians. We like to be carried to ancient Rome and rejoice to struggle with the documentary evidences of an Egyptian princess. The most popular stories of the present day seem to be those that deal with countries or social strata with which the readers have least acquaintance. Our cosmopolitan taste had been stimulated by translations from the French and German, and Tolstoi had taught us to look still farther a-field for an intellectual fillip. Here was Valdés' chance, and he improved it well both for England and in France and Germany. But one result of this is that he no longer writes for an audience that can check the truth of his fiction by their own experience. Rather he is writing for an audience who expect him to produce something different from other men and nationalities. Hence he is prone to exaggerate local color and his natural gift of humorous description sometimes verges on caricature. In this regard he may be more justly compared to Dickens than any of his predecessors. No student of Dickens could get from his novels an adequate or a just picture of English life, and Valdés has not given us a just picture of Spanish life in his later novels. But it would be idle to deny their power and merit. He is certainly first in wit among Spanish writers to-day, and shows no signs of failing vigor. Yet many readers will still prefer his earlier manner and find in *José* and *El Cuarto Poder* more of genuine value than in the work done for the foreign public and more immediately accessible to them.

Our account of modern Spanish fiction began with a woman. Caballero first broke the bonds of Romanticism; Señora Bazan is, it seems to the writer, the leader of literary Spain to-day. We shall, perhaps, describe her best by a comparison with George Eliot, which indeed has suggested itself to many and has several limitations obvious enough to those who know her work. Señora Bazan is the most learned woman in Spain, one of the most learned Spaniards of her day, and she is one on whom learning sits lightly; she is no David in Saul's armor. Her historical and philosophic studies are admirable, surprising, perhaps, when one considers her nationality; but we should not be too hasty in such a judgment. Spain may be backward, but we may remember that the middle ages were quite as well disposed to the higher education of women as the Europe of to-day.

Madame Bazan did not win her literary laurels as a writer of fiction. She entered these lists some ten years ago as a scholarly writer of recognized merit. But she has been steadily productive in this field, and seems likely to give it her best talents in the future. Galicia, her native province, first claimed her attention, and nowhere can there be found a more just appreciation of that strange life that must remain hidden even from the most attentive tourist. Later, like Valdés, she has withdrawn more and more from her native heath to the capital. Her stories have become longer and of a more tragic cast, but always vivid, lively, and true, and not seldom lighted up with flashes of wit, enlivening a style which yields only to that of Valera.

Other writers there are of promise, among whom it may be just to signalize the Jesuit Father Coloma, but enough has been said to show that Spain has a vigorous school of naturalistic fiction that shows no signs of decay. Its faults are those that seem inseparable from this school, an anxious heaping up of details, a meticulous accuracy which often sinks into prolixity and a disposition to ticket each personage with a list of his characteristics, as though he were a tree in an arboreum. Perhaps this is inevitable if we are to

have psychological studies in the form of fiction. At any rate, we find it gaining rather than losing ground in France and Germany, where this form of fiction is most cultivated.

Alfred Morel-Fátio, writing for the *Encyclopædia Britannica* his singularly unsympathetic account of Spanish literature, graciously allows that the novel "is incontestably the triumph of contemporary Spanish literature; it is almost the only form of composition that actually lives with a life of its own and makes steady progress." This is true, far truer than another statement of the same author, that every species of Spanish composition "either bears unmistakable traces of imitation of foreign models, or shows (more or less happily) the imprint of the older literature of the seventeenth century." Modern Spanish fiction is certainly in no sense derived from the seventeenth century. It differs wholly from the novels of that day both in what it does and in what it tries to do. No more is it an imitation of the French. Chronology alone suffices to prove that. The Spanish movement is contemporary with, sometimes even precedes, the French. They travel much the same path, as is natural, since they start from much the same point, and they have reached much the same goal, though Spain has been spared the extravagances and much of the indecencies of the Parisian *décadents*. There is a good deal of healthy conservatism in Spain, and with such critics as Valera and Bazan we may well look confidently to a long career of healthy progress in the future for Spanish fiction.

It is natural that the literary movements of Spain should find their reflection in Spanish America, whose literary life deserves, and we trust may shortly receive in these pages, an independent critical study.